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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TFH01: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES SANTOS AND LOBO
BRIEF G-16

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 909 (B) TEGUCIGALPA 885

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Ambassador met on September 23 with the four presidential candidates who had signed a communique expressing support for the San Jose Accord after a September 16 meeting with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. The candidates told the Ambassador that they are scheduled to meet with de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti on September 24 and will also seek a meeting with President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya. The candidates said they would issue a communique before the meetings with Micheletti and Zelaya reiterating their support for the San Jose Accord and expressing their commitment to the principles of democracy, peace, and respect for human rights. The Ambassador subsequently spoke to President Zelaya about the candidates' initiative he agreed to meet with them this afternoon at 4PM. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador met on September 23 with presidential candidates Elvin Santos of the Liberal Party, Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo of the National Party, Felicito Avila of the Christian Democratic Party, and Bernard Martinez of the Social Democratic Innovation and Unity Party (PINU). They were joined by former Presidents Carlos Flores and Ricardo Maduro. DCM and Political Counselor also attended the meeting. This was the Ambassador's first meeting with the candidates since the return of President Zelaya to Honduras on September 21. Both former President Maduro and Santos said that Zelaya's return had complicated the country's situation.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador praised the candidates' leadership in meeting with President Arias and told them that it is important that they continue to demonstrate such leadership (see reftels). The Ambassador said that the U.S. continues to believe that a negotiated solution is the appropriate way forward and that the San Jose Accord is a good solution, which should be signed right away. He stated that the United States has called on all parties to remain calm and avoid actions that might provoke violence.

¶4. (C) The candidates expressed frustration that the international community has failed to express support for the electoral process. Avila told the Ambassador that this weakens the candidates' ability to influence events and to help resolve the country's crisis. The candidates and former President Maduro told the Ambassador that the international community has not been critical of President Zelaya, even

when he has engaged in unhelpful actions and dialogue. Former President Flores encouraged the international community to tell President Zelaya that he cannot call for demonstrations when staying at the Embassy of Brazil, a diplomatic mission.

15. (C) The candidates told the Ambassador that they are scheduled to meet with de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti on September 24. They said they would also seek a meeting with President Zelaya following the one with Micheletti. The candidates noted the importance of putting distance between themselves and both Micheletti and Zelaya and making clear that they represent the country's future and want a negotiated solution under the San Jose framework. They decided that they would issue a communique before the meetings with Micheletti and Zelaya expressing their dedication to Honduras' future and to the principles of peace, democracy, and respect for human rights. The Ambassador subsequently spoke to President Zelaya who agreed to meet the four candidates this afternoon at 4PM.

16. (C) Comment: The candidates are the best internal political source for putting pressure on the regime to negotiate with Zelaya. Zelaya's return to Honduras complicates the regime's plan to proceed with elections while ignoring the San Jose process. It will be more difficult for the international community to recognize the elections with the country's president under virtual house arrest in the Brazilian embassy, or sitting in a jail cell. The candidates realize that their political futures depend on a settlement. We will continue to encourage them to engage.
LLORENS